

SEARCH AND RESCUE FUND STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

**Recommended by the Advisory Council
Approved by the DOLA Executive Director
January 2016**

Introduction

1. The Colorado Legislature created the Search & Rescue (SAR) Fund through the adoption of C.R.S. § 33-1-112.5 Search and Rescue Fund (“SAR Fund Statute”). The SAR Fund is operated pursuant to the Search and Rescue Rules 8 C.C.R. 1307-1, et seq. (“SAR Fund Rules”).
2. The Search & Rescue Advisory Council (“Council”) is appointed by the Executive Director (“Director”) of the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and exists to make recommendations to the Director in the allocation of monies from the SAR fund. All funding decisions are ultimately within the authority of the Director.
3. These SAR Fund Standard Operating Guidelines (“Guidelines”) are intended to provide programmatic guidance based on the experience and knowledge of the Director, Council members, and DOLA Staff. These Guidelines are a continual work in progress and must comply with the aforementioned SAR Fund Statute and SAR Fund Rules; in the event that there should arise a discrepancy between these Guidelines and the SAR Fund Statute or Rules, then the Statute and Rules will prevail.
4. The Council and DOLA Staff may recommend changes to modify these Guidelines at any time, but all changes must be approved by the Director. While the possibility of change exists for these Guidelines, it is generally accepted that the provisions herein may be reasonably relied upon for future planning and current decisions.

General Administration

5. Sheriffs are statutorily charged with search and rescue operations C.R.S. § 24-33.5-707 (10). The DOLA Staff recognizes that SAR activities may be carried out differently in every county. DOLA recognizes local control and attempts to maintain flexibility in serving every county, every unique situation, and all eligible missions.
6. The DOLA Staff will evaluate reimbursement requests and adhere to program rules and procedures.
7. Each county sheriff has the discretion to continue or to terminate a search and rescue mission based on a presumption of life or presumption of death.
8. The county coroner makes a declaration of death when a body is present. When a body is not present, a declaration of death can only be made by the courts.
9. The SAR Fund is not insurance. It does not pay subjects. It reimburses sheriffs for eligible costs incurred in the discharge of a SAR mission. The sheriff shall be responsible for certifying and submitting the claim to DOLA on forms provided and for the proper distribution of SAR funds to all agencies and political subdivisions entitle to reimbursement C.R.S. 33-1-112.5 (4)(a)(ii.).

10. It is recognized some members of the Advisory Council may have a conflict of interest in funding decisions for specific teams and/or counties. In cases where funding decisions are voted on by the Council, those members who may have a conflict of interest in the funding decision will recuse themselves from voting.
11. The DOLA Staff will conduct meetings as stated in C.R.S. 24-6-401, open meetings law. When decision items require a vote, council members will make their vote and DOLA Staff will record each individual vote accordingly. The Executive Director will chair all meetings.
12. The SAR fund, at this time, will not fund the purchase of drones thru the end-of-year application process.

Eligibility for Reimbursement

13. Any eligible agency (public, private, or volunteer association providing specialized search and rescue services and resources) are eligible to receive funding and must be authorized by a county sheriff or political subdivision C.R.S. 33-1-112.5(3).
14. The SAR Fund was created in response to the need for financial assistance with search and rescue in remote locations. SAR activity primarily connected to back country, outdoor activity or recreational pursuits. It is not intended to be for urban SAR. It is not generally intended to pay for locating in-town walk-aways, evidence searches, equipment recovery, animal rescue, crime scene investigation, response to vehicle accidents, or other traditional law enforcement activities.
15. A sheriff should take into consideration the 3 A's when submitting a claim; Action, Access, and Activity. In determining eligibility of a mission, DOLA Staff considers the following actions taken by the sheriff to access the subject and the activity being pursued by the subject at the time the incident occurred:
 - a. Was the subject engaged in an outdoor activity or recreational activity generally accepted as one intended to be reimbursed by the SAR Fund?
 - b. Were the resources deployed to an area beyond the boundaries of normally available emergency services or were they of a more urban, general law enforcement or fire protection nature?
 - c. Did reaching the subject require the specialized skills of a SAR resource or could more traditional medical or law enforcement personnel respond?
16. If the recovery of a subject's body is incidental to the search and rescue mission, the mission is eligible for reimbursement if the subject was presumed alive prior to the time the body was found.
17. If a search and rescue mission ends without a successful rescue of a live person and the sheriff presumes that the subject is not alive, the reimbursement portion of the mission is terminated. If the body of the subject is later discovered, the recovery of the subject's body is not eligible for reimbursement.
18. Invoices must be provided for costs to be reimbursed. This includes volunteer mileage, meals, or other expenses. A valid invoice carries the vendor name (or volunteer signature), date, description, and dollar amount.
19. The rules prohibit funding medical costs or medical transport. An ambulance, whether air or ground performing solely ambulance functions, is considered medical transport and expenses for this are not eligible for reimbursement by the SAR Fund.
20. It is acknowledged that under certain circumstances an air ambulance is utilized as a SAR resource to avoid duplication of effort or when the status of the subject dictates rapid rescue. Under these circumstances, an air ambulance may be considered a SAR resource and as such be eligible for PARTIAL cost reimbursement. A ground ambulance will never be considered a SAR resource.



21. Agencies requesting reimbursement costs for expenses intended for insurance coverage must first seek payment from any applicable insurance policy that may exist. When insurance is available, as first payer policy, the insurance policy must pay before DOLA Staff will consider the mission reimbursement request. After all insurance payments are made; the SAR fund may reimburse the remaining eligible costs.
22. Equipment rental from an independent party is an eligible expense. Invoices are required for reimbursement. Volunteers or team members may rent personally owned equipment to the sheriff for a SAR mission. One team or political subdivision may rent equipment to another team or political subdivision.
23. Equipment owned by the sheriff, team, or political subdivision responding to an incident within its own service area is not eligible for reimbursement at rental rates under the logic that an agency cannot rent equipment to itself. Operating costs for those entities, such as gas and oil or repairs are reimbursable if original invoices from third party vendors are provided.
24. DOLA Staff maintains a list of average market rates for Colorado that have been determined for snowmobiles, horses, boats, and off-highway vehicles by surveying private vendors in higher cost areas of the state. A percentage of the average market rate schedule will be applied to volunteer and government owned resources.
25. Resources are reimbursed at reasonable rates and DOLA Staff reserves the right to determine reasonableness.
26. DOLA Staff will differentiate between rates paid on resources provided by private companies and rates paid for volunteer or government resources.
27. Resources requested by the Sheriff and provided by private companies are paid at full invoiced cost with the exception of private air ambulances.
28. DOLA Staff will use the reimbursement rates for Rotor Wing Medical Resources:
 - a. The SAR Fund may provide reimbursement, based on a federal rate schedule, for rotor wing medical resources used in backcountry medical evacuations for the rescue component of that mission.
 - b. DOLA Staff will use helicopter rates established by the U.S. Office of Aircraft Services to reimburse the rescue element of a backcountry medical evacuation. The national resource database is maintained by U.S. office of aviation services and is updated regularly.
 - c. As with all other resources, when insurance is available for a medical helicopter, that policy must pay before DOLA Staff will consider the mission reimbursement request. After all payments are made, the SAR fund may reimburse up to one hour of flight time at a rate established by OAS for the make and size of helicopter used on the mission.
29. DOLA Staff recognizes that government equipment is purchased at taxpayer expense. Hence government owned equipment will be paid at a predetermined percentage of the market rate.
30. DOLA Staff recognizes that volunteer equipment is utilized primarily for private use and is only available periodically for SAR purposes. Hence volunteer owned equipment will be paid at a predetermined percentage of the market rate.
31. Invoices from the volunteer or government agency will still be required. As stated earlier, a government agency can invoice another agency for resources provided, but cannot invoice its self for missions conducted within and under its own jurisdiction.
32. Mission reimbursement is intended to reimburse hard invoiced costs. It is not intended as a grant to be placed in SAR team accounts. Sheriffs are expected to distribute any reimbursement funds received to eligible agencies and individuals who provided invoices to the sheriff as part of the reimbursement request. Sheriffs should not simply use SAR fund reimbursements as donations to SAR teams. If SAR team members wish to donate to their team, this should be done through a transaction independent of SAR team reimbursement.

33. Tier I reimbursements are paid upon review and approval by DOLA Staff. There is no cost limit for Tier I reimbursements.
34. Tier II reimbursements are reviewed and approved by DOLA Staff but will be held until end of State fiscal year and paid based on availability of funds. There is a cost limit of a minimum of \$150.00 or more in which a Tier II mission will be reimbursed. Tier II reimbursement requests under \$150.00 will not be paid.
35. Tier III reimbursements are reviewed and approved by DOLA Staff but will be held until end of State fiscal year and paid based on availability of funds. There is a cost limit of a minimum of \$150.00 or more in which a Tier III mission will be reimbursed. Tier III reimbursement requests under \$150.00 will not be paid. DOLA Staff will provide and submit a brief narrative on Tier III missions over \$1,500 or more to the Council for review at the end-of-year application annual meeting.
36. Missions where paid invoices or paid receipts have not been provided may be declined. DOLA Staff will contact the sheriff for the appropriate documentation and will allow 30 days thereafter for submittal. If after 30 days no paid documentation is submitted, DOLA Staff will decline the mission reimbursement for payment.
37. Tier II reimbursements will take priority over Tier III reimbursements. Tier III reimbursements will take priority over end-of-year funding.

End-of-Year Applications for Equipment and Training

38. County sheriffs may apply for equipment and training funds at the close of each state fiscal year. The application deadline date is April 1st of each year.
39. It is expected the county sheriff will maintain accountability for equipment purchased through the program.
40. Equipment accountability may include transfer of title, hand receipt or other legal formats.
41. In applying for end-of-year award funds, it is expected the sheriff will consider the amount requested is practical and within the SAR funds availability of revenue. The sheriff shall take into account that the items requested are not "over-the-top" items in which the SAR fund may be depleted rapidly.
42. Adherence to the practical policy for requested amounts to be within the limits of \$20,000 is recommended.
43. Justification for high cost items will be required at the time of application.
44. These funds are primarily intended to support and enhance the eligible agencies that conduct SAR missions for a sheriff. Along with other factors, the Executive Director, Council, and DOLA Staff will consider the suitability of funds to counties.
45. End-of-year funds for search and rescue related training and equipment shall be paid on a priority basis as determined by the Executive Director of the Department of Local Affairs following recommendation by the SAR Advisory Council which may consider the following criteria in establishing this priority C.R.S. 33-1-112.5 (5)(c).
46. In developing an application, the following points should be considered:
 - 1) Past funding have ranged from \$2,000 to \$15,000 and averaged around \$8,000.
 - 2) Funding recommendations are based on several criteria including:
 - a. # of missions
 - b. SAR missions as a ratio of county population
 - c. levels of funding from prior years
 - d. complete application
 - e. adherence to deadlines
 - f. demonstrated need thru justification for items and amounts requested



- 3) Eligible items may include computerized mapping programs, GPS units, snowmobiles, ATVs, water rescue boats and equipment, high angle rescue courses, communications equipment, team issued safety related clothing and equipment, and small items such as climbing ropes and accessories.
 - 4) Non-Eligible items include building construction or acquisition, vehicles designed primarily for highways such as rescue trucks or four-wheel-drive vehicles.
47. Adherence to the timeframes set forth by DOLA Staff for purposes of administration of the SAR Fund program is highly recommended.
 48. The Sheriff is accountable for all funds and is responsible for documenting all expenditures to the Department of Local Affairs. All receipts for expenditures from the fund must be received prior to or with the current end-of-year application.
 49. All funds are made payable to the County Sheriff. It is the responsibility of the Sheriff to distribute funds to the eligible agency for which the sheriff applied. Funding decisions are normally made in June. However, successful applicants should not expect fund distributions prior to August 5th. The sheriff must acknowledge in writing receipt of such funds and agree to purchase those items to which funding was provided. Expenditures must be made within the funding period July-April.
 50. Jurisdictions failing to provide paid receipt documentation by the due date (April 1st) will be ineligible to receive end-of-year funding.
 51. If items requested on an application can no longer be obtained, prior approval is needed by the SAR Program Manager. New items requested can only be those listed in that years application which was submitted for funding.
 52. If ineligible items are purchased, the County is responsible for returning the funds to the SAR Fund accordingly.

Guidelines revised 1/2016

